What is claimed is:

1. A housed rotating shaft assembly comprising:

a shaft;

a housing enclosing at least a portion of the shaft; and

a rolling element bearing mounted within the housing and supporting the shaft, the rolling element bearing comprising:

opposed inner and outer raceways positionable in a loaded position;

a plurality of substantially rigid load bearing rolling elements positioned between and in generally point or line contact with the inner and outer raceways when the raceways are in the loaded position; and

a plurality of compressible rolling elements positioned between the inner and outer raceways and having surface area contact, greater than point and line contact, with the inner and outer raceways when the raceways are in the loaded position.

2. The housed rotating shaft assembly according to claim 1 wherein the load bearing rolling elements are smaller in diameter than the compressible rolling elements.

3. The housed rotating shaft assembly according to claim 1 wherein the compressible rolling elements are elastomeric.

4. The housed rotating shaft assembly according to claim 1 wherein the compressible rolling elements are made of an elastomeric material and the load bearing rolling elements are made of steel.

5. The housed rotating shaft assembly according to claim 1 wherein the rolling element bearing is mounted within the housing such that the opposed inner and outer raceways are initially positioned in the loaded position.

6. The housed rotating shaft assembly according to claim 1 wherein the rolling element bearing is mounted within the housing such that the opposed inner and outer raceways are initially positioned in a substantially unloaded position wherein the compressible rolling elements are generally free from deformation.

7. The housed rotating shaft assembly according to claim 1 wherein the load bearing rolling elements and the compressible rolling elements are positioned between the raceways in a 1 to 1 alternating relationship.

8. The housed rotating shaft assembly according to claim 1 wherein the load bearing rolling elements and the compressible rolling elements are positioned between the raceways in a 2 to 1, respectively, alternating relationship.

9. The housed rotating shaft assembly according to claim 1 wherein the shaft is part of a steering column.

10. The housed rotating shaft assembly according to claim 1 wherein the inner raceway is defined by the shaft.

11. The housed rotating shaft assembly according to claim 1 wherein the outer raceway is defined by the housing.

12. The housed rotating shaft assembly according to claim 1 wherein the rolling elements are balls.

13. The housed rotating shaft assembly according to claim 1 wherein the rolling elements are needle rollers.

14. A rolling element bearing configured for mounting within a housing for supporting a rotatable shaft, the rolling element bearing comprising:

opposed inner and outer raceways positionable in a loaded position;

a plurality of substantially rigid load bearing rolling elements positioned between and in generally point or line contact with the inner and outer raceways when the raceways are in the loaded position; and

a plurality of compressible rolling elements positioned between the inner and outer raceways and having surface area contact, greater than point and line contact, with the inner and outer raceways when the raceways are in the loaded position.

15. The rolling element bearing according to claim 14 wherein the load bearing rolling elements are smaller in diameter than the compressible rolling elements.

16. The rolling element bearing according to claim 14 wherein the compressible rolling elements are elastomeric.

17. The rolling element bearing according to claim 14 wherein the compressible rolling elements are made of an elastomeric material and the load bearing rolling elements are made of steel.

18. The rolling element bearing according to claim 14 wherein the rolling element bearing is mounted within the housing such that the opposed inner and outer raceways are initially positioned in the loaded position.

19. The rolling element bearing according to claim 14 wherein the rolling element bearing is mounted within the housing such that the opposed inner and outer raceways are initially positioned in a substantially unloaded position wherein the compressible rolling elements are not deformed.

20. The rolling element bearing according to claim 14 wherein the load bearing rolling elements and the compressible rolling elements are positioned between the raceways in a 1 to 1 alternating relationship.

21. The rolling element bearing according to claim 14 wherein the load bearing rolling elements and the compressible rolling elements are positioned between the raceways in a 2 to 1, respectively, alternating relationship.

22. The rolling element bearing according to claim 14 wherein the rolling elements are balls.

23. The rolling element bearing assembly according to claim 14 wherein the rolling elements are needle rollers.